

codex alimentarius commission



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
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Agenda Item 4 (d)

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JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME CODEX COMMITTEE ON MILK AND MILK PRODUCTS

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PROPOSED DRAFT STANDARD FOR PROCESSED CHEESE COMMENTS AT STEP 3

Comments from: Australia, Canada, Colombia, France, Germany, New Zealand, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States, and Uruguay

General

AUSTRALIA

Australia would like to thank the drafting group led by the International Dairy Federation for the preparation of the proposed draft standard for processed cheese. Australia's view is that this standard should be flexible. In principle we are in favour of a deregulated standard that provides for the opportunity for consumers to benefit from technology progression.

Overall we are happy with the flow of the Standard. We wish to make the following comments on some specific points:

CANADA

Canada would like to thank the International Dairy Federation for leading the preparation of the proposed draft standard and the compilation of the report of the Drafting Group. Canada recognizes and acknowledges the challenges in proceeding with this standard and the fact that agreement is required on its general approach.

The key point for the Committee to resolve will be whether the standard should just encompass products marketed as "Process Cheese" (A-8(a) & (b)), or include those marketed as "Process Cheese Preparations" (A-8(c)), considering the difficulties in drawing a clear technical line between them. Canada believes that both product types should be covered by the standard in order to provide more meaningful information to consumers by combining similar common names into one, with the nature of the product further defined by composition and additive requirements.

Although Canada believes the most encompassing standard would be the best to cover the reality of the marketplace while still maintaining the standard's integrity, the following comments will be based on the 2002 Committee decision (A-8(a) & (b) only).

FRANCE

The proposed draft standard in the annex to document CX/MMP 04/6/7, the result of a consensus, as established during the CODEX working group discussions, is approved by France.

GERMANY

The document on processed cheese CX/MMP 04/06/9 demonstrates that it was not possible to reach a consensus on the key elements of the standard and that an agreement on the general approach to the standard is still necessary to achieve further progress.

It is agreed that the standard should cover processed cheese only, excluding processed cheese products and preparations (ALINORM 03/11, para. 102). Though it is recognized that the perception of the nature of such a product differs among countries, the term “processed cheese” remains the common basis. Taking the plain wording as a basis, processed cheese should be nothing else than cheese in accordance with the Codex Stan. A-6 which undergoes a further specific process.

However, with regard to the discussion within the committee it seems to be impossible to find a consensus on such an approach. On the other hand it must be avoided that the consumer is misled on the nature and quality of the product, namely a product made from cheese. Therefore, in case the work on the standard will be continued at all, Germany’s opinion will be that cheese shall at least constitute the largest single dairy ingredient. Such an approach is just narrowly in accordance with the wording and therefore merely complies with consumers’ expectations. In terms of consumer information this approach will mean that cheese will be listed first in the list of ingredients.

Otherwise, if no such requirement as to the relation of cheese to other dairy ingredients is established, the use of the term “processed cheese” could result in a considerable misdirection of the consumer, for example when the product is designated as “processed emmental” without containing a significant amount of “emmental”. Such a designation would also contradict the labelling provisions of the Codex General Standard for Prepackaged Foods according to which the name shall indicate the true nature of the food.

SWEDEN

Low fat processed cheese

Sweden finds it important that the standard does not exclude or prevent the development of processed cheese with a low fat content. The nutrition policy in Sweden is based on Swedish nutrition recommendations. According to these recommendations not more than 30% of the energy uptake should come from fat. For most people this would mean a reduction of fat in their food. The high fat content of Scandinavian food is believed to be connected with several serious diseases, such as cardiovascular diseases, some types of cancer, obesity and biliary calculus. The type of fat is found to be of greater importance than the amount. The nutrition work is focused on reducing especially the saturated fats, such as animal fats.

Consumers are increasingly aware of the fat content in foods. In many cases the products that have the lowest fat content are preferred. The national nutrition policy has led to increased knowledge of this public health issue.

Regulations and standards should not counteract the nutrition work. For this reason low fat products should be regarded as the high quality products they are.

Sweden believes that the proposed standard is not clear enough on these points. The standard should not include any minimum fat percentages of processed cheese.

Quality of process cheese

The drafting group has discussed several options of the general approach of the standard. The standard should cover most existing processed cheeses. On the other hand there should be no risk for the consumer to be misled on the nature and quality of the product, namely a product made from cheese, which is mixed, melted and emulsified. If the discussion on the options will be continued Sweden prefers option 4 of the options proposed in the report of the drafting group resulting in cheese being the first in the list of raw materials in processed cheese.

UNITED KINGDOM

Thank you for the opportunity to consider this draft. Whilst we were participants in the Drafting Group we feel that there are several points that the UK considers still need to be addressed.

The UK would especially like to emphasise the need for one specific definition of processed cheese to ensure consistency in application of the Standard in different countries. The two very similar definitions are unnecessarily prescriptive and confusing. We would like to suggest that 2(b) is unnecessary and that the list of approved ingredients in 3.1(a) should also be removed. This would leave 2(a) as the single definition of processed cheese with 3(b) as the definitive approved ingredients.

UNITED STATES

The United States recognizes and appreciates the work of the drafting group on process(ed) cheese. The working group report reflects the continuing difficulties that exist in standardizing this product internationally with a Codex standard. At the 5th Session of the CCMMP, the United States addressed the difficulties that CCMMP was facing in revising the standards for process cheese and suggested that because of these difficulties, process cheese did not lend itself to international standardization. We suggested that the committee discontinue its work on this standard and rescind the existing standard which does not adequately reflect products in international trade.

The Proposed Draft Standard for Process(ed) Cheese, included as an annex to this report, contains a substantial number of bracketed paragraphs that indicates significant disagreement amongst the working group members. We recommend that CCMMP discontinue work on this standard and rescind the existing standard that does not adequately reflect products in international trade.

General approach to the Standard

If CCMMP chooses to continue work on this standard, the United States recommends that the general approach identified as Option I be the basis for this continued work.

Section 2

AUSTRALIA

We support the product description in Option II, however we believe that Option III also provides sufficient flexibility.

CANADA

The current proposal, with reference to the raw materials permitted in 3.1, may not permit current products to be called Process Cheese, as they may not result in similar physical, chemical and/or sensory characteristics.

Canada supports the product description outlined in Option II since it provides an overall general description that covers the diversity of Process Cheese products. This copies the format of the Fermented Milks Standard which outlines the general description of the product category and then allows or provides for more specific descriptions or product names. For example, Naming the Variety Process Cheese could be described more restrictively.

COLOMBIA

The best description is that under IV

Include classification according fat content and texture

FRANCE

With a view to reaching a consensus, France agrees with the proposed text.

NEW ZEALAND

The description in the proposed draft is very restrictive in that it only allows cheese and some non-cheese milk products for (fat) standardisation purposes only. It would exclude some processed cheeses that New Zealand currently trades. We therefore do not support this option.

Our preferred description is the wording given in Option III of the discussion paper, but option II would be acceptable.

SWEDEN

In the proposed standard Sweden wants to retain the text within brackets in “description” in point 2. This will ensure the nature of the product being a processed cheese prepared predominantly from cheese and the consumer will not be misled regarding the nature of the product.

UNITED KINGDOM

Section 2(a) - The UK feels that the use of emulsifying salts should be optional as a small proportion of processed cheese is manufactured without the use of emulsifiers. We suggest a wording change to “...with the aid of heat with or without emulsifying salts.” We assume this type of product will still fall under the description of “Processed Cheese”.

URUGUAY

There does not seem to be sufficient grounds for dividing the processing technique into two options. In our opinion, the description in Option III covers the processing techniques, so we recommend modifying items 2 and 3:

Processed cheese means a product manufactured from cheese and milk products which is mixed, heated, melted and emulsified with or without added emulsifying salts, to form a homogeneous mass.

Section 3.1

CANADA

In light of the comments above, raw materials could be simplified as:

Cheese, with or without milk and/or other products obtained from milk.

However, raw materials for Naming the Variety Process Cheese would be more restrictive:

Cheese, with or without the addition of milk fat products for standardization of fat. As well, the details currently contained under 7.1.2 could be moved to the corresponding sub-sections within Section 3 (Essential Composition and Quality Factors).

COLOMBIA

We would consider another milk ingredients like sweet whey, casein, skimmed milk powder

FRANCE

In point 3.1 a, we propose:

- Re-examining the need and applicability of the terms "to adjust the milk fat", as these provisions restrict the potential use of these raw materials;
- Deleting the square brackets and so retaining in the list of proposed raw materials, those between the brackets, namely dairy spreads, cream powder, milk and milk powder;
- Correcting in the French version, the English term "*Dairy Spread*" translated into French as "Fromages Fondus pour tartines", whereas it should read "pâtes à tartiner à base de produits laitiers".

NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand would not support the restriction of raw material addition based on component standardisation.

SWEDEN

Sweden wants to retain the possibility for fat adjustment both upwards and downwards as proposed in the text within brackets in point 3.1. It is not necessary to specify the milk products with which fat adjustment may be done. The means to adjust is not essential as long as the main raw material is cheese.

UNITED KINGDOM

The UK would like to point out that certain products on the market have larger quantities of butter/powder, hence feel that the wording in the first square brackets implies that only small adjustments of the fat content, for standardisation purposes, would be permitted. We would also wish to express our support for the retention of all the raw materials mentioned in the square brackets, with the additional inclusion of whey powder and lactose.

URUGUAY

Cheese* with or without the addition of the following:

Milk and/or other products obtained from milk

*) For specification, see relevant Codex Standard.

Section 3.2

AUSTRALIA

Permitted Ingredients; potassium chloride should be listed as an alternative to sodium chloride.

COLOMBIA

Another ingredients could be: species, condiments, conserved meats, flavour enhancers like sodium glutamate.

Not Gelatine and starches, use of these raw materials is not fair and could mix up the consumer.

FRANCE

France really does not see the need to make provision for the addition of gelatine and starch in this standard.

NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand supports the inclusion of gelatin and starch as permitted ingredients.

UNITED KINGDOM

The UK supports the inclusion of starches in the list of permitted ingredients.

URUGUAY

We recommend deleting the square brackets providing the text of 4. Food additives “stabilizers and thickeners (for higher moisture and/or low fat Processed Cheese”) is retained.

Section 3.3

AUSTRALIA

Composition; the minimum dry matter content should be 30% and there should not be any requirement for fat in dry matter to be defined in processed cheese.

COLOMBIA

Minimum dry matter content (m/m) 55-60%

FRANCE

France supports setting a minimum dry matter content.

NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand would support a minimum dry matter content, with the value to be determined.

SWEDEN

Sweden does not want to specify a minimum fat content as proposed in 3.3. The possibility to produce low fat processed cheese should be retained for public health and nutritional reasons.

URUGUAY

A Minimum dry matter content (m/m) of 30% is recommended, based on what has been established in the MERCOSUR 96/134 Standard.

In light of the recommendation for 2. Description, change the wording of the Note, as follows:

Note: Supplementary criteria for the ratio of fat in dry matter for Processed Cheese described in Section 2 to be further considered.

Section 4

AUSTRALIA

Australia agrees with the list and supports the removal of three sets of brackets (ie these additives should be included).

CANADA

Canada supports the table approach for the development of the additive classes.

COLOMBIA

Specify the Emulsifying salts: Salts Na, K, and Ca, of citric acid, Phosphoric, and Tartaric.

Colours: Natural colours

Preservatives: Include Nicin and Natamicin, this is better to not take the risk of aflatoxins.

Instead of anticaking agents, non-stick agents.

NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand would support the table approach if it should be necessary to restrict certain additive classes to sub-categories of processed cheese.

New Zealand would also support the inclusion of emulsifiers, stabilisers and thickeners and anti-caking agents as additional additive classes in a processed cheese standard.

SWEDEN

The list of additives is not yet completed. The list of food additives should take into account additives needed for spreadable and low fat processed cheeses, that is emulsifiers and stabilizers and thickeners are needed.

UNITED KINGDOM

In order to make possible reductions in sodium content, the UK would like to request the addition of "salt substitute" in the list of permitted additives. We also feel that the category, "flavours", or "flavourings" should be included to take into account the use of enzyme modified cheese for flavour purposes. Furthermore, we would like to express support for the retention of emulsifiers, stabilisers and thickeners and anti-caking agents, all of which are widely used by UK manufacturers.

URUGUAY

We recommend removing all the square brackets from this item.

Section 7.1.2

AUSTRALIA

The words "...at least (75)%..." should be replaced with "...more than (at least) 50%..".

The clause: "other dairy ingredients do not exceed x%" should not be included.

The clause on fat in dry matter should not be included as it is irrelevant in processed cheeses.

COLOMBIA

75% of cheese is ok.

Other dairy ingredients do not exceed of 8%

NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand considers that the issue of named varieties is adequately covered by the general labelling rules (such as the *General Standard for the Labelling of Prepackaged Foods*, the *General Guidelines on Claims* and the *General Standard for the Use of Dairy Terms*) and therefore need not be addressed in the processed cheese standard. This would greatly simplify the standard.

If a figure for minimum cheese content is to be included, it should be based on products currently in trade.

SWEDEN

Sweden wants to delete the text within brackets in 7.1.2 saying that the fat in dry matter should not be less than the minimum fat of a named cheese variety. The reason again is the preference for low fat processed cheese.

Sweden finds it essential that the fat percentage of the product is clearly labelled on the package so that the consumer is correctly informed.

UNITED KINGDOM

In order for products to comply with the description in Section 2a, we suggest deletion of the “a” in “2a” in the first indent. Products with strong flavours of certain cheeses should be taken into account, hence we propose the 75% be reduced to 50%. This encompasses a wider range of products, thereby removing the need for the fourth indent. The UK strongly feels that inclusion of the sentence in the square brackets after the fourth indent would restrict processed cheddar cheese to a 40% maximum water content, thereby implying a high fat content in the product. UK consumers are increasingly aware of the fat content in foods and do not want products high in fat.

URUGUAY

Uruguay recommends making the following changes to the text:

Where it says: "the cheese blend from which the product is made contains at least [75]% of the cheese variety(ies) claimed"

Suggested text: " the cheese blend from which the product is made contains at least 75% of the cheese variety claimed".

Uruguay supports simplifying the text:

The content of fat in the dry matter of the product is not less than the minimum fat in the dry matter required for the named cheese (or the arithmetic average, if two or more varieties are named) and the dry matter content is no less than 1% less than the minimum required for the named cheese (or not less than 1% less than the arithmetic average, if two or more varieties are named):

Section 7.1.3

AUSTRALIA

This clause is not necessary and should not be included, as it provides no benefit.

URUGUAY

The cheese variety name(s) may also be claimed by designating the product "Processed Cheese with _____", the blank being filled with the name(s) of the variety(ies) provided that min. 5% of the dry matter content of the final product is derived from the cheese variety(ies) claimed.

Section 7.3

AUSTRALIA

There should not be any requirement to declare the percentage of cheese as this would provide no benefit and is left to the national legislation anyway.

COLOMBIA

We would prefer leave the square brackets sentence [if so required in the country of retail sale]

FRANCE

France would like the square brackets deleted, and so is very keen to see the words “if so required in the country of retail sale” retained in the sentence.

NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand agrees that if a cheese content is declared the declaration should be based on the ingoing percentage of cheese. The need for such a declaration depends on the option that is chosen for the description of the product.

UNITED KINGDOM

The UK strongly supports the requirement to label cheese content.

URUGUAY

Uruguay recommends deleting the square brackets from the text.

Section 7.4

AUSTRALIA

The protein content should not be required to be declared. However, should CCMMP 6 decide that something should be declared for processed cheeses, then the protein content declaration would be more relevant than the cheese content declaration.

UNITED KINGDOM

The UK feels that consumers would not be misled by the omission of the milk protein content. Making the decision on this dependant on the country of sale has the potential to produce barriers to trade. We would suggest removing this requirement.